



# **The AFL Coaching Lifestyle: Improving life satisfaction, health & well-being**

An AFL Research Project for 2011

**Final Report  
22<sup>nd</sup> May 2012**

## **The AFL Coaching Lifestyle: Improving life satisfaction, health & well-being**

---

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Dr. Mandy Ruddock-Hudson

**RESEARCH TEAM:**

Dr. Paul O'Halloran

Professor Greg Murphy

School of Public Health and Human Bioscience

Faculty of Health Science

La Trobe University

Bundoora, 3086

Further information and enquiries can be directed to Dr. Mandy Ruddock-Hudson

[M.Ruddock@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:M.Ruddock@latrobe.edu.au)

---

**COMMENCEMENT DATE:** June 2011

**COMPLETION DATE:** May 2012

**PARTICIPANTS:** Information presented on 17 AFL clubs (2011)

**RESEARCH AIMS:** The aim of this study was to obtain preliminary information that identifies the life satisfaction and general health and well-being of AFL Coaches. This data may be utilised to guide the design of educational and health self-management programs for AFL coaches

---

This research was conducted by La Trobe University in conjunction with the AFL Coaches Association and funded by the AFL Research Board.

The research team would like to thank the Australian Football League and the AFL Research Board for their support during this project.

Special thanks to the AFL Coaches Association for their support and guidance throughout the duration of the project and to the AFL teams and coaches who participated in the project.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND	4
Aim	6
Objectives	6
Research design	6
STUDY 1	7
An exploration of the AFL Coaching lifestyle	
METHOD	8
Participants	8
Interview schedule	8
Data analysis	9
RESULTS	9
STUDY 2	20
The AFL Coach questionnaire: Identifying life satisfaction, health and wellbeing	
METHOD	21
Participants	21
Procedure	21
Measures	21
The General Health Questionnaire	22
Maslach Burnout Inventory	22
Depression Anxiety Stress Scale	22
The Job Related Tension Index	23
Data analysis	23
RESULTS	24
CONCLUSIONS & PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS	30
REFERENCES	35
APPENDIX	38

## **BACKGROUND**

Sports coaches are exposed to a complex, ever-changing environment that imposes various pressures (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). Not only are coaches mentors to athletes but they guide athletes in physical, mental, technical and tactical skills, as well as facilitating their personal development (Fletcher & Scott, 2010).

As the number of paid coaches increases worldwide, the evolution of coaching has now become a recognisable occupation that is fast advancing towards professionalisation (Lyle, 2002).

For coaches who operate within elite sport, the pressures typically intensify in a results-orientation culture that requires considerable investment of time and resources in the search for the competitive edge (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). In many sports, the period of employment can be short and positions within elite coaching are highly sought after.

Australian Football is regarded as one of the highest-profile sports in Australia. Coaching at the elite level in AFL is potentially rewarding, yet very challenging. Not only do coaches take on the formal coaching role but they must adopt multiple roles including those of a mentor, organiser, educator and counsellor. Given the multiple roles coaches must assume, and the technical, physical, organisational and psychological challenges involved, coaches should be regarded as multi-faceted employees who need to perform across a variety of settings. Further, the performance of these multiple roles requires extensive time commitments with limited opportunity to attend to important matters external to football (e.g. family, friends, and recreation).

Although some AFL coaches may thrive in their coaching profession, other coaches may have a less positive experience, resulting in the coach leaving the coaching environment due to workplace stress or potential job burnout. Health and wellbeing of workers and stress in the work place have been studied throughout human history (Spielberger, 2010). Stress has become one of the most serious health issues of the twentieth century (Lu, 1999). Chronic job stress has been associated with a range of physical (e.g. sleep deprivation), psychological (e.g: depression), social (e.g: interpersonal conflict) and behavioural (e.g: alcohol and drug abuse) health problems (Levi, 1996). Not only does job stress affect an individual in physical and psychological terms, but it is also a problem for employers and government departments who usually incur financial costs (Lu, 1999).

A large number of epidemiological studies have identified that chronic stressful experience at work can adversely affect physical and mental health (e.g. Godin, Kittel, Coppieters, & Siegrist, 2005). In addition, it has been demonstrated that job stress can also have a negative effect on motivation (Frey, 2007). Therefore, it is important to identify potentially modifiable stressors in the work environment. Other professions with a high degree of personal interaction have received significant research attention (Olusoga, Butt, Hays, & Maynard, 2009) for example occupations such as university teachers (e.g. Winefield & Jarret, 2001), the police force

(Thompson, Kirk, & Brown, 2006), and in the health care industry (e.g. Spence Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Wilk, 2003). Although previous research has identified the stressful nature of sports coaching (e.g. Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, & Chung, 2002), a “more in-depth and broader understanding of the stressors that reside in elite sport will allow coaches and organizations to design more appropriate interventions to manage the demands placed on performers” (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005, p. 1131). In consideration of the multiple roles that coaches must assume, and the technical, physical, organizational and psychological challenges involved, coaches should be regarded as performers in their own right (Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees, & Hutchings, 2008). Previous research has identified that coaches must adopt multiple roles including that of a mentor, educator, friend, counselor and organizer (Lyle, 2002). In consideration that coaches’ performances and their future employment are often judged by the success of their athletes (Gould et al., 2002), it is not surprising that coaches experience stress as a result of the growing demands they encounter (Olusoga et al., 2009). Research has previously tended to focus on the relationship between stress and coach burnout (e.g. Kelly & Gill, 1993). The term “burnout” has been extensively used in sport literature to describe this response and this issue has raised considerable concern from sports coaches and sports psychologists (Raedek, Lunney, & Venables, 2002). In both professional and sport settings the concept of burnout has been extremely popular. Not surprising, the stressful situation and risk for burnout among coaches also attract media attention (Hjalm, Kentta, Hassmenan, & Gustasson, 1997).

More recently, studies have identified the stressors associated with sports coaching. For example Frey (2007) examined the stress experiences of National Collegiate Athletic Association Division One Coaches and identified that communicating with athletes, a lack of control over athletes, recruiting, having multiple roles and responsibilities were cited as stressors. In particular, coaches reported that a desire for more free time, less interference with family time, and losing passion for the job, were stress factors that may increase the likelihood of leaving the profession.

In consideration of the above factors, and that the coach’s performance across various settings is often influenced by factors not directly within their control, coaches are potentially susceptible to excessive mental and physical fatigue. This fatigue can have an impact on their performance in the coaching role and their health. Therefore, it is important that reliable information is obtained regarding the impact of the coaching role and how to maximise (consistent with their work-role demands) the life satisfaction and general health and well-being of AFL coaches.

To date, there is no research that examines the coaching lifestyle experienced by professional Australian Rules Football (AFL) Coaches. Although this population of coaches may appear relatively small, the opportunity to investigate this unique Australian sample is warranted because of the wide-spread popularity of Australian Football and the attention and scrutiny that

is paid to those involved, especially coaches of AFL teams. In addition, it is a population that, due to increased workplace demands and scrutiny, places them at risk of occupational stress associated with a lack of work-life balance

This research is the first project to examine the life satisfaction and general health and well being of AFL coaches. This project may provide information that will lead to improved knowledge of coaches' occupational stress and of modifiable work-life balance issues for these coaches. This will ultimately not only enhance the health and well-being and potentially performance of coaches, but it may also inform important risk management policies and programs for AFL coaches.

### **AIM**

The aim of this study is to obtain preliminary information that identifies the life satisfaction and general health and well-being of assistant AFL Coaches. This data may be utilised to inform and guide the design of educational and health self-management programs for AFL coaches

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To identify factors that influence life satisfaction, and general health and well-being experienced by AFL assistant coaches.
- To provide recommendations that may enhance the work-life balance of AFL assistant coaches.
- To provide data that will assist the AFL Coaches Association establish educational and support services to coaches.
- To assist in the establishment of educational and health self-management programs that are tailored to the industry support needs of AFL coaches.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **Study 1:**

##### **An exploration of the AFL Coaching lifestyle**

**Interview data collection:** Semi-structured interviews were developed by the research team in conjunction with the AFL and AFL Coaches Association which were exploratory in nature (see Appendix A). One assistant coach representative from each of the 17 AFL clubs in the national competition was asked to take part in the interview process during the 2011 AFL season.

#### **Study 2:**

##### **The AFL Coach questionnaire: Improving life satisfaction, health and wellbeing.**

Information obtained from the interviews in Study 1 was utilised to guide the construction of a questionnaire in a larger quantitative study.

The questionnaire package was distributed to 93 AFL assistant coaches in the 2011 season. The questionnaire package contained items related to general demographic information, social support, general health, job-stress, tension and burnout, and effective reactions.



# **STUDY 1:**

## **An exploration of the AFL Coaching lifestyle**

## METHOD

### **Participants:**

One assistant coach representative from each of the participating clubs (n = 17) was invited to take part in a semi-structured interview. Each participant had been nominated as their respective club's Coach Delegate for season 2011 and therefore was the representative for the AFL Coaches Association. All 17 Delegates agreed to participate; thus, the response rate was 100%. These coaches had been coaching AFL at the elite level from 2 years to 12 years, with an average of 8.6 years.

Coaches were initially asked to provide some background information on their coaching career. The format included questions relating to their involvement at AFL level, previous coaching employment and coaching commitments. The rationale for including this information in the study was to provide the researcher with an understanding of each coach's background and previous employment history.

Open-ended questions regarding the coaches' lifestyle were posed. Although an interview schedule was devised based on previous literature, the sequence of interview questions could change to accommodate the coach's responses, thus providing flexibility in the interview process suitable for in-depth responses. A selection of the questions were pilot tested with retired coaches and minor revisions were made to ensure clarity and understanding of the interview questions, prior to the interviews being carried out.

### **Interview schedule:**

Semi-structured interviews were designed by the researchers in conjunction with the AFL and AFL Coaches Association. Key parameters from the literature were used as the basis for the interview guide. The semi-structured interview guide addressed the following core areas: background information (e.g. can you describe your work commitments associated with AFL coaching during a normal week in-season?), performance (e.g., what do you perceive to be the main demands that you face when coaching in the AFL?), general health (e.g. can you tell me about other stressors that may be related to / or impact your job?), life satisfaction (e.g. do you perceive that there are some variables that may influence your work-life balance?), social support (e.g. to what extent do you feel that you are supported in your current role, from the senior coach and other assistants, AFL Coaches Association, and your immediate family?), motivation (e.g. what motivates you to continue coaching in the AFL?), and workplace employment (e.g. what are some of the challenges you have been faced with when renegotiating your contract with your current / past club?).

As this was an exploratory study, coaches were encouraged to elaborate, explore and share their experiences regarding their coaching lifestyle. In many cases the researcher just let the coaches "go with the flow" to enable them to convey information that was important for them within the flexible confines of the core interview topics.

### **Data Analysis:**

Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts of the interview material were repeatedly read to enhance familiarity. The interview material was then analysed via thematic analysis utilising the guidelines recommended by Braun and Clark (2006). Thematic analysis is a widely used form of qualitative analytical method which identifies, analyzes and reports patterns (themes) within data (e.g., Braun & Clark, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001). The approach taken by thematic analysis is a flexible and useful research tool that can provide rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Although there is no one ideal theoretical framework for conducting qualitative research it is important that the framework and methods "...match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognise them as decisions" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 80). By reporting the experiences, the meanings, and the reality of participants, thematic analysis provides a method, whereby individuals make meaning of their experiences (Braun & Clark, 2006).

## **RESULTS**

General demographic information showed that AFL assistant coaches worked between 50 to 100 hours per week with an average of 58.2 hours per week, amongst these 17 assistant coaches. Coaches discussed the nature of Australian football and the requirements that were involved with the job. This included: training methodologies, match committee meetings, game and player reviews, video edits, game preparations and player consultations;

*"Six days of work, probably around 60-70 hours. If you were to ask me about my previous years, I'd say I worked about 90 hours per week. I was doing opposition, as well as opposition and line coach. So just an average, I'd say around 75 hours."*

General information was discussed in relation to what it takes to be an effective coach in the AFL. Coaches spoke about the importance of a good knowledge and understanding of the game, a comprehensive analysis of games and to be able to provide effective feedback to players. In addition, the coaches noted how important it was to be accurate in research and delivery and to remain energetic when striving for excellence.

As an elite coach in the AFL, coaches reported on the expectations of excellence. When involved in an elite sports program coaches reported that it was their job to facilitate elite performances by their players and to deliver quality presentations to other coaches and players.

*"The demand is excellence, no doubt. You're an elite sporting environment where expectations are high, so you've got to deliver elite, high end presentations in coaching. The senior coach demands that, and he's got that role because that's where he's at. So he's trying to build people below him that deliver similar excellence."*

Six distinct themes emerged from the analysis of the coach interviews: (i) *the challenging nature of the game*; (ii) *satisfaction with life balance*; (iii) *social support*; (iv) *lack of job security* (v) *taking leave, health and other considerations*; and (vi) *the motivation and love for the game*. In addition, *concluding findings* were also identified.

***The challenging nature of the game:***

Of the 17 coaches who were interviewed, 95% commented on the time commitments associated with the job. For example;

*“The main demand is your time. Your time and the pressure that you’re under within that time limit. You know your players and its getting the job done. Really you’re a school teacher, I’ve always said that. That’s my philosophy on being an assistant coach. Being a senior coach is a little bit different but we are more of a school teacher and it’s the pressure you’re under and making sure you get your students to perform to their job properly so there is a lot of pressure in that area.”*

Coaches further elaborated on the main demands that they are faced with when involved in elite coaching. Results indicated that it was challenging to balance their time. The majority of coaches discussed that it was difficult to find a balance between family life and work life. For example;

*“Personally, I think the main demands are just making sure that you’re seen to be doing a good job, but juggling that with everything else too. You know, just that life balance. Your whole life is demanding. I’ve got kids and you want to try and be part of their sport, but also you don’t want to detract from doing what’s required to get the job done.”*

This was further supported by another coach who reported that:

*“It’s juggling the balance between work and home that is probably as big a challenge as any, and you just can’t, like people say, leave your work at work. Well you can’t do that as assistant coaches, because we are always watching, you’ve got football to watch, you’ve got to keep up to date with what’s going on... even on the footy shows. You can’t get all your work done at work because you’ve got players around. So there’s times when you’ve just got to do your work at home and it’s that separation between home and work.”*

Another coach further identified that the main demands in AFL coaching was not coaching itself but the time involvement and the balance between family and work. For example;

*“There has got to be a certain level of commitment involved in the football department, so you understand obviously the time involvement during the year. But you still have to balance that up. You can push hard at times for one or two years, but are you going to be able to sustain an environment that’s affecting your*

*external relationships, or family, for much longer than that? Even yourself, and your own personal time.”*

Balancing the family life and job were reported to be the main challenges when involved in AFL coaching. Consistent with reports from the majority of coaches, one coach described the experience as;

*“Best way I’d describe it is trying to be the juggler, and keeping the balls in the air. Work, family, relationships, health, finances and the one that I have always struggled with is probably the individual one. You just become a juggler but you drop yourself because you’re trying to please others. As an assistant coach that’s what I found, and it’s really difficult to keep all the balls in the air.”*

### ***Satisfaction with life balance***

Based on their current coaching practice, assistant coaches were asked to rate and discuss their work/life balance. Results indicated that the average response for the 17 coaches for the question “to what extent are you currently satisfied with your work/life balance as an assist coach?” was 3.4 out of a rating of 5. When further asked “to what extent do you perceive this rating to be health promoting?”, the responses from assistant coaches indicated a low rating of 2.8 out of a possible 5. Thus indicating that here was an unequal distribution of time between work commitments and leisure. For example;

*“Life is family, its health; it’s managing your finances, spiritual side of things, your own exercise program. So if I was to rate all things as one being poor and ten being excellent, your relationship with your partner and children, I’d rate those things below where they need to be. Whereas, I would rate my work up around an eight or nine because it’s just so...I think the industry demands it, and I have seen people that haven’t been able to because they say, they’ve got their priorities wrong, and that’s the industry.”*

This was further supported in the following quote;

*Generally you get a choice of whether you want to do work, or whether you want to go for a walk, or go for a run, or whatever it may be, and unfortunately, I think sometimes we put our health demands on the back-burner. And also, I think once again, it’s a little bit related to time, in regards to the time between games and the amount of work you have to get done. But in saying all that, it’s still the responsibility of us coaches to make sure that we are doing what we need to do to keep healthy, and that’s eating right, and sleeping and doing physical activity, and we get a chance to do physical activity at training, which is good. We get the choice of eating right and I think the only thing that suffers is our sleep.”*

Coaches did comment on the fact that the game kept them physically fit and always active, for example;

*“A tricky one. Mentally not good, but physically it’s fantastic, because we keep active, and we’ve got a job. We force each other to go out for runs. Physically great, mentally hard!”*

### **Social Support**

Coaches were further asked to rate their level of perceived social support in their current role. Each coach was asked to rate and discuss the extent to which they felt supported by the senior coach and other assistant coaches, the AFL Coaches Association and their immediate family. Support for the immediate family was perceived to be highly rated from all 17 coaches with an average rating of 4.8 out of 5, followed by support from the AFL Coaches Association with an average rating of 4.1 out of 5 and then finally support from the senior coach and other assistant coaches with a rating of 3.9 out of five. Consensus among coaches was that the family was the initial support provider. For example;

*“My family understands what I do. They really do understand that it’s a consuming job, and it takes up a lot of life. So they understand it. They’ve lived it. That doesn’t mean they’re always happy with it, but they’ve lived it.”*

Generally the consensus about perceived support from the AFL Coaches Association was positive. Coaches commented on how a number of useful services were available to coaches. Although it was widely acknowledged that the Coaches Association was a positive support provider, several coaches did discuss that they did not utilise the service to the full extent. For example;

*“We probably don’t use them enough, to be quite honest, but they are always sending you out material for professional development, and trying to be proactive and help us, so I think we get a lot of support.”*

This was further supported by another coach who stated;

*“I’ve got a full understanding that that’s available, and I’m sure that commitment will get more and more once they start to get a bit better infrastructure going, and as they get a bit more money in, or whatever. But I have assistance, and I know a lot of coaches did last year, because there was quite a turn over, and it’s been known that the communication was straight away, and clear so that was my quick dealing with them in changing clubs was really good.”*

The majority of coaches pointed out how the Coaches Association would continue to grow and develop. Coaches reported that the Association was an essential organization that was the main professional support provider in the AFL industry. One coach commented on how the growth of the organization and further support will continue. For example;

*“If the AFL is on board and if the AFL is genuinely concerned about its fraternity as they are about their players and respect for women and indigenous, then there is no doubt it will happen. It will take place. You sitting here means a step in the right direction. It might not come in my time, but it’s a step in the right direction.”*

Conversely, there were a small number of coaches who discussed increasing the support offered from the Coaches Association to the assistant coaches

*“I think they could support their assistant coaches better, at the moment it’s all about looking after the AFL senior coaches, but the support that the AFL assistant coaches get is just simple little things. The AFL senior coaches get their games counted towards their life membership and stuff, but the AFL assistant coach doesn’t get any of that stuff. I can’t see any difference between what people are doing. One’s given more credence because they’re called the senior coach against a bloke who’s doing just as many hours and as much work. If you relate it to the best player on the team, to the second best player, or third best player on the team, they’re still equally as valuable.”*

The rating response in relation to support from the Senior Coach and other assistants was skewed towards positive. Support from the senior coach and other assistant coaches had an average rating of 3.9 out of 5. For example;

*“we are all in it together so generally their support is good.”*

*“I think we are all in the same boat, so I think we provide a great support for each other, because we are always together, and we understand each other’s personal situations and also the general things that can happen in life. So I think there is a really good support from the assistant coaches and definitely the senior coach. He’s outstanding with things that may occur in the work week, or the work year, and we’re all in the same boat, so I think we have good empathy for each other, and I think the senior coach is at the forefront there.”*

Although it was acknowledged that all the coaches from the one team were working towards a common goal, there were a few coaches that did comment on the separation between the coaching group based on the work that they do;

*“I do work closely with them but I also work separately. I’m in charge of one area and I have to get that right, being in tune with what the group is doing.”*

This was further reiterated by another coach who stated;

*“The senior coach has been great but not so much the other assistants. Because the reality is we are competing against each other”*

***Lack of job security:***

The third theme that emerged from the interview data was with respect to the lack of job security. Although the majority of coaches identified that a balanced life was one of the challenging aspects involved with AFL coaching, a high percentage of coaches further discussed that the insecure nature of the job meant that coaches were devoting a large proportion of their time in coaching to enhance the possibility of a contract extension and longevity in the job. Coaches discussed how they felt obliged to stay at work, even if their work was completed. In addition, coaches reported that they couldn't be seen arriving late to work or departing early if they wanted to enhance their chances of a contract extension. As reported by one coach;

*“It's such a short term job in some cases that you are just never sure if it's a safe job or not, so security is a major thing. And, it's as I say, can go from week to week, year to year, month to month even.”*

Coaches further discussed the uncertainty of their role which was a result of a high percentage of coach turn-over in the AFL system. Generally coaches were given contracts that spanned two to three years with a termination clause of up to four weeks. Results indicated that job security was a theme of high importance. Findings were consistent across the 17 AFL club representatives, for example;

*“Coaches are being sacked, boards are being overturned or trying to be overturned, instability amongst positions, difficult to get on and just do your job with other influences trying to take away from that. But the overwhelming part is it is like a wave trying to push you in one direction and you're trying to resist. You can hang on for so long but eventually... I was involved a few years ago in a club that the coach got the sack half way through the year and that was difficult.”*

Another coach reported that:

*“You never quite know how long they're going to be here for, or what's around the corner, because if there is a change at the top, then what happens to the assistants, that can be one thing, and what do you do next if it doesn't happen? Are there other jobs in footy? How does your brand look to other clubs if you want to stay? We've got families, so do we want to shift, and things like that...it's always challenging.”*

Generally coaches were informed at the end of the season if their contract was to be renewed. While the end of the season is generally considered a period of annual leave for coaches, a high percentage of coaches considered themselves in “limbo” while waiting to hear from their respective clubs in relation to their future employment;

*“I find the leave you get at the end of the season ridiculous. You're either in contract or out of contract, and if you're out of contract and you haven't been told, then that leave is not like leave at all. That's just time to go away and sit at*

*home and stress out rather than sit around here and actually be busy. So that's the worst type of leave, that end of season leave, if you're out of contract, it's terrible. I've been through it a number of times."*

Another coach further reported on his experience, for example;

*"At the end of the season when I was out of contract I took two weeks leave and sat around waiting for an email to turn up. That's no good for anyone. You should well and truly know that you are either re-employed or you're not by that period."*

In addition, one coach reported on the lack of communication between the respective parties at the conclusion of his contract and described how he never really "got over" the situation;

*"I never really got over the last one, but I put a smile on my face and got on with it. We were negotiating a contract that just never got negotiated. My pay rolled onto the next year, no-one spoke to me, so I thought, I could have done two things; I could have come back a bitter twisted man and let that affect my job and my reputation, or just put it behind me. You're probably amazed things like that still happen? But it happened."*

Coaches were asked if they understood the consequences of their current contract's termination clause. Nine of the 17 coaches interviewed were aware and understood their termination clause in their contract. Two coaches were not aware of the clause and a further six coaches were unsure of the termination arrangements in their contract. Of the coaches who were aware of their contract clauses', the majority of them had sought advice during the negotiation process, for example;

*"When I was negotiating my contract with a club, I went to a friend who I had worked with in a previous life and he has got a law background and he looked through the contract and said; Get rid of this, do this etc. He ended up saying I needed to remove a number of clauses. .... So I went to the club and said; you're employing me for X years and you want me to have a six month termination clause. And they said, everyone has got them. And for me, I said, well, it's a six month contract then. The advice I received was to say; I will have the termination clause but it will take place after X years. So it is a X year contract and the termination clause comes in only in my X year. So again it's that bargaining power. There was a clause in my contract at my previous job where if the head coach lost his job, that my contract would be null and void as well, and I said that I wanted that removed, and they said the head coach is going to be here forever..."*

Another coach discussed how he made alterations to his contract, for example;

*“Mine’s a different one. I made sure that it was written into mine that it was for the length of the contract, that if I’m terminated at any stage, I’m looked after. That was personal negotiation that I think most boys don’t get, and I think it’s crazy that they’re not given that security.”*

Coaches further elaborated on the ratio of work to pay. The majority of coaches reflected on the hours that they devoted to their job compared to the rate of pay provided and whether this was comparable to the number of hours worked by players, for example;

*“When you put it into perspective, the players have twenty contact hours a week, plus a game, we have 60 to 80, and our hourly rate would be horrendous, compared to them, so it would be good to be able to get a standard wage and contract where we are paid for what we do. Job satisfaction is one thing, but also, because you put in all those hours, you want to be really rewarded for what you do, and results are great rewards, but being comfortable in what you do, with your spouse and not having to work, or whatever it may be, is pretty important, as well as your kids”*

A large proportion of coaches were consistent in their views in relation to hours worked with respect to financial rewards and recognition for what they did, for example;

*“the problem is, the senior coaches’ money has gone up but the assistants have stayed the same. But we work the same hours”*

***Taking leave, health and other considerations:***

When discussing aspects about the health of those in the industry, the majority of coaches indicated that they did not utilise their sick leave, instead reporting that “we don’t get sick in footy.”

*“If you get sick, you hang in there. Unless you’re half dead, you come to work. It’s just the way we are I think. No-one forces you to do that. It’s just a given.”*

Coaches further discussed that the end of season annual leave was a “time to freshen up”. Coaches elaborated on their request for annual leave discussing that generally there were no issues in relation to “time off” during the period of October to November;

*“Annual leave stuff...no issues, been fantastic. The club has probably given me more time and getting paid for probably taking an extra week, or two weeks, on top of what I already get from a contractual point of view. So the club’s been outstanding in regards to that, and understanding that being away from home, and family, and all that sort of thing. There is a really good balance which is managed from our General Manager.”*

This was further supported by another coach who stated that;

*“We take our annual leave every year. We’re encouraged to do so. It’s so important to have a break, and refresh all the time and I think that’s important. It’s also important for family, so that’s certainly one thing that this club is very good at.”*

It was noteworthy to identify that generally coaches did not take personal leave. Coaches further elaborated that if personal leave was taken, generally a coach would feel guilty. In addition, coaches commented that in a male dominated environment they did not like to admit that there may be potential issues outside the football environment and therefore discussed how they had to “soldier-on”. In addition, a high percentage of coaches were not aware of what personal leave was;

*“Everyone feels guilty about personal leave. But if a guy’s got to go home to deal with something, or whatever, we just do it. Just say go...we will cover for you. But often they don’t do it. They soldier on. But they don’t want to admit to the boys in a footy club that oh no I’ve got to go home. But when we have had issues like that, we’ve got guys who seem to do it, but it is very rare.”*

***The motivation and love for the game:***

Although coaches did identify challenging aspects of the game, a predominant theme that emerged from the interview data was with respect to the “love of the game”. Coaches reported how they wouldn’t be in an industry and devote large proportions of their time to the game if they didn’t “love it”. Coaches reported how they enjoyed developing the players for example;

*“It’s more than coaching to me. I actually really just enjoy helping people develop, and see them improve, whether they be coaches, or whether they be players, so that’s what I like. I mean originally I was a teacher, so that’s the reason I did that, and this is just an extension of that. I sort of teach in the field that I really love, so that’s probably it.”*

This was further supported by another coach who stated that;

*“To see players playing and winning is another motivating factor, but to see players develop and do the things that they can do really well, to get the best out of themselves, that’s really motivating.”*

In addition, 50% of coaches reported that football was what they knew and loved, for example;

*“I think sometimes its habit. I’m very passionate about my footy, and I love the involvement, and I see it as a real privilege to be involved in an AFL club at that level. I think the players keep you young, and keep me focused. I really enjoy the relationships I’ve created within the club and with the players, and all involved with the club..... I think it’s a challenging environment, because it’s changing all the time and I think challenge and change motivate you to perform.”*

### **Concluding findings:**

At the conclusion of each interview coaches were asked to provide further comments (if required). Generally coaches reported that it was a “tough industry” with “many challenges” however the “love of the game” was the motivating factor to continue. Coaches did reinforce however that achieving and/or enhancing a balanced lifestyle for those in the industry was essential. The following examples support the concluding comments;

*“It’s a tough industry to work in. I know people don’t really understand how many hours you put in, but also if you don’t get the reward with it. This is my fifth year, and I haven’t made finals as a coach. So if you’re not getting rewarded, it can wear you down. You need to have that stimulus to keep you going.”*

*“I think the stress of the coaching lifestyle is you don’t get your weekends during the year. It’s taking time away from your family, and it’s a balance to get the job done, you need to put the hours in. At the same time, you need to have the balance between home time, family time, work time, and leisure as well. So it is very demanding during the football season.”*

*“Probably one big challenge is a lot of clubs want to develop but there’s no time to do it, so they actually might set aside money to do a course and that type of thing but actually finding the time in season to develop yourself is difficult. That’s probably the greatest challenge. If you’re putting those hours in, to actually do a business course or a management course, yeah, sure you can do it, but you’re putting it on top of whatever you’re already doing which is, talk about the work – life balance thing! So I think clubs want to develop their people, and they’ve got to have a real understanding that they’re going to have to probably cut down the time that you’re spending at the club, and try and develop you as well.”*

*“I think there are legitimate concerns for coaches, and their lifestyles, and maybe you have just got to accept that as part of the job. That might be it, but if there is some way that we can make sure that we’re not killing them, then that’s a good*

*thing too. There is a mentality that if we get the best in, they last for 6 years, and if they are not a senior coach, they move on, or they love it so much, they keep going. But at what cost to their families and things like that? So if it ever gets to the stage where it costs me my family, I'm out, and no doubt it puts stress on."*



**STUDY 2:**

**The AFL Coach questionnaire:  
Identifying life satisfaction, health,  
and wellbeing**

## METHOD

### **Participants:**

At the time of this research, there were 94 full-time professional AFL Assistant coaches in Australia. All of these coaches were invited to take part in the study. These coaches represented 17 AFL clubs within the national competition. Of the 94 assistant coaches that were asked to take part in the study, 80 full-time assistant coaches agreed to volunteer for the study, thus representing an 85% response rate. Coaches were encouraged to participate in the study through the industry coaching body, the AFL Coaches Association.

### **Procedure:**

Following ethics approval from the La Trobe University Ethics committee, each AFL football club was contacted via email with an invitation to participate in the study. The AFL Coaches Association provided written approval for the research to be undertaken with the assistant coaches from the AFL clubs. The research project was also supported and funded by the Australian Football League.

Initial information about the research was sent via an email to each AFL club coach delegate. A follow-up email was then sent to each AFL club coach delegate in relation to the data collection process. The club delegates then distributed the official invitation to partake in the research to each assistant coach. Coaches who agreed to participate were then provided with information which outlined details about the research, confidentiality of the research and the procedure to withdraw from the research. Coaches were informed that they were under no obligation to take part in the research and no incentive was offered to the coaches for their participation. Following written consent from each participant, the questionnaire was administered to the assistant coaches. Participants were instructed via written information that they were to complete the questionnaire within a specified five-day period. The rationale for this allocated time period was to ensure that all coaches completed the questionnaire in-season at approximately the same time before the finals campaign period commenced. In order to prevent reactive effects from the presence of other football club personnel, the coaches were instructed to complete the questionnaire in relative privacy. Participants were instructed, prior to the administration of the questionnaire, that all the information was strictly confidential, and that their name would not appear in any results.

### **Measures:**

The questionnaire was specifically designed by the research team in conjunction with the AFL Research Board and the AFL Coaches Association for the purpose of this research. The questionnaire took approximately 20 to 30 minutes for each assistant coach to complete.

The content of the questionnaire was guided by the main themes emerging from exploratory interviews that were undertaken in Study 1. The questionnaire comprised of a series of closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire required coaches to supply information regarding demographic information including their involvement in AFL coaching, the number of hours

associated with their work commitments, their social support networks and the demands perceived in the industry (see Appendix B). Additional psychometric measures were utilised that related to the key constructs that emerged from the interview data in Study 1. After extensive research of psychometric measures that covered these core areas, the following questionnaires were deemed valid and reliable for the purpose of the study: The General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988), Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and the Job Related Tension Index (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, Rosenhal, 1964).

**The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ):**

The General Health Questionnaire (see Appendix C) was originally developed in the 1970s. It is a measure of mental health that focuses on two major areas; inability to carry out normal function, and appearance of new and distressing experiences (Donath, 2001). The GHQ has since been used as a widely dimensional instrument in the community (Gao, Luo, Thumboo, Fones, Li, & Cheung, 2004) and it is a good measure of psychological measure of wellbeing. Respondents rate themselves according to the degree to which they have experienced each symptom over the past week.

**Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI):**

Research that has investigated coaches' responses to stress has provided some insight into the relationship between stress and coaches' health with a particular focus on "burnout". Burnout, a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) is a potential response to chronic stress or an imbalance between demands and coping resources (Smith, 1986).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (see Appendix D) consists of 22-items factored into three subscales; Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment. Factors in the Emotional Exhaustion subscale describe feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. The Depersonalization subscale describes an unfeeling and impersonal response or dissociation. The Personal Accomplishment subscale contains items that describe feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people.

**Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS):**

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (see Appendix E) was designed as a self-report scale to measure negative emotional states to further the process of defining, understanding, and measuring significant emotional states in a variety of settings (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The DASS contains 14-items divided into three subscales; depression, anxiety and stress.

***Depression:***

For the purpose of this study, depression was characterised principally by a loss of self-esteem, and incentive, and was associated with very low perceived probability of attaining personal life goals of significance to the individual (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

***Anxiety:***

Anxiety involves the "...longer term anticipation of negative events which typically, but not exclusively, are psychological in character" (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, p. 33). According to Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), anxiety is most likely to develop when the individual:

- faces performance demands that are challenging and that are of critical significance for the individual's self-esteem;
- has relatively low self-esteem or high self-imposed performance demands that are both challenging and of significance for the individual's self-esteem;
- perceives the probability of failure to be high;
- has a low threshold of activation of the fear system.

***Stress:***

Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) suggested that "...stress may be conceived as a persistent state of over-arousal which reflects continuing difficulty in meeting taxing life demands" (p.33).

**The Job Related Tension Index (JRTI):**

In formal organisations, roles generally have established relationships and expectations, but unclear roles and contradictory demands can lead to role conflict and ambiguity (Kahn et al., 1964). The formal organisation consists of individuals who have various roles within their environments, where role behavior is a complex outcome of interactions and pressures exerted on individuals within organisations and groups (Wooten, Fakunmoju, Kim, LeFevre, 2010). The Job Related Tension Index (see Appendix F) is a 15-item measure designed to assess job tension, a latent variable associated with role conflict and role ambiguity (Kahn et al., 1964). Job tension is influenced by the dynamic and changing nature of an organisation and its environment (Wooten et al, 2010). The Job Related Tension Index questionnaire therefore asks respondents to indicate how frequently they are bothered by job-related factors.

**Data analysis:**

Data were analysed using the statistical computer package SPSS. Demographic and descriptive data were analysed and Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was calculated to provide an indicator of internal consistency (i.e. reliability). For the purpose of this report, an overview of descriptive findings has been presented.

## RESULTS

### Demographic information

Results indicated that there was considerable variability in coach demographics. Table 1.1 shows that the average amount of years as an assistant coach was 4 years, with a minimum involvement of 6 months and a maximum of 10 years.

Similarly, there was considerable variability in the hours in which an assistant coach worked during the season. Coaches indicated that they worked a minimum of 40 hours per week with a high percentage of coaches indicating that they worked more than 70 hours per week “in-season”. In fact, as noted in Table 1.1, the average amount of work was approximately 70 hours. Interestingly, although coaches identified the number of hours worked at the football club, a large percentage of coaches reported that they spend more hours “thinking” about their work while they were away from their work environment. In addition, of the coaches surveyed, the average period a coach reported that they wanted to remain in the AFL coaching system was 6 years.

*Table 1.1 Demographic Information*

<b>Demographic information</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Years of involvement as an AFL Assistant Coach	6 months	10 years	4.0 years
Number of working hours associated with coaching per week in-season	40 hours	100 plus	69.1 hours
Number of years wanting to stay coaching in the AFL system	2 years	10 plus years	6.0 years

Table 1.2 indicates satisfaction with social support. Coaches were asked to rate satisfaction with support on a rating scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating minimal support and 5 indicating a very high level of support. Assistant coaches reported a mean score of 3.0 in relation to their current satisfaction with their work-life balance, indicating that coaches were somewhat satisfied with their current work-life balance. However, one-third of assistant coaches were not satisfied with their work-life balance. It was reported that assistant coaches were generally satisfied with the support received from other coaches at their respective clubs, and support from the AFL Coaches Association. Coaches were extremely satisfied with the support that they received from their family. Interestingly coaches reported lower satisfaction with support received by management at their respective clubs and support from coaches at other clubs.

Table 1.2 *Satisfaction with Support*

Satisfaction scores	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Satisfaction with your work-life balance	3	5	3.0
Satisfaction with support from coaches at <i>your</i> club	3	4	3.7
Satisfaction with support from coaches at <i>other</i> clubs	1	3	2.3
Satisfaction with support from management at your club	2	4	3.1
Satisfaction with support from the AFL Coaches Association	4	5	3.6
Satisfaction with support from family	4	5	4.5
Satisfaction with support from friends	4	5	3.9

\*1=minimal support to 5=very high level of support

The work-rate of assistant coaches identified that only 54% reported one scheduled day off per week during the season. A large majority of coaches reported that they worked 7 to 14 days consecutively and although a coach may be offered a “day off” it was reported that assistant coaches would utilise this time to complete video editing, reports and presentations. In addition, assistant coaches were asked if they understood the termination clause in their current contract and whether that influenced their actual workload. Responses indicated that only 54% of assistant coaches had an understanding of their current termination clause.

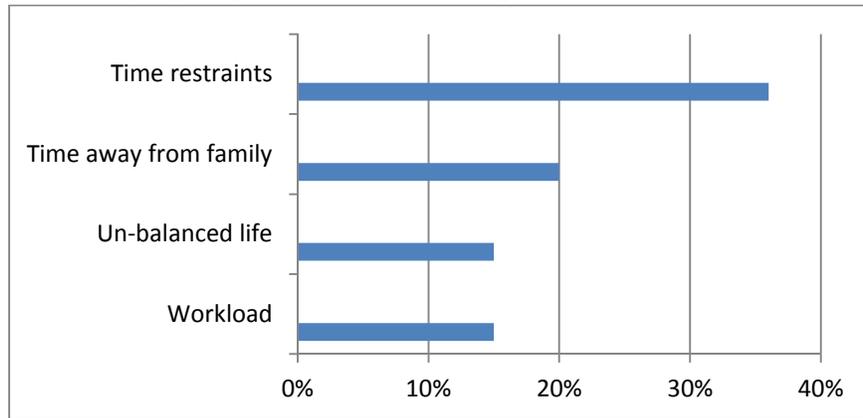
Taking leave, health concerns and other considerations were reported with respect to annual leave, personal leave and sick leave. Coaches were asked to report on the extent to which they had utilised various leave in the previous twelve months. Table 1.3 identifies that mean scores were low. In particular, assistant coaches reported that they had utilised an average of 2.01 weeks of annual leave in the previous twelve months, 0.3 of a day with respect to personal leave and only 0.14 of a day for sick leave.

Table 1.3 *Annual leave, personal leave and sick leave*

Personal well-being	Mean
Last 12 months: utilisation of annual leave	2.01 weeks
Last 12 months: utilisation of personal leave	0.30 day
Last 12 months: utilisation of sick leave	0.14 day

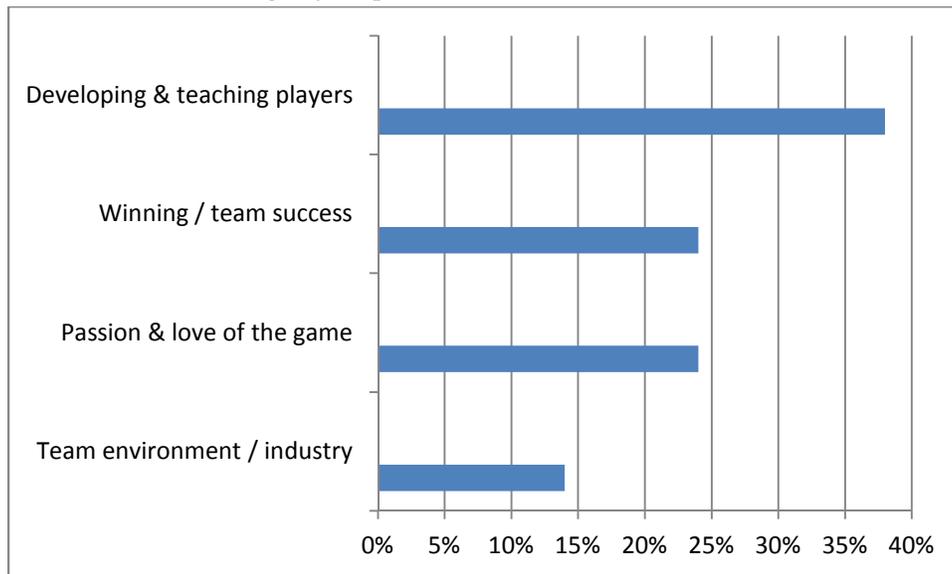
Assistant coaches were asked to identify the main demands that they perceived they face when coaching in the AFL. Table 1.4 highlights that time restraints, time away from family, an unbalanced lifestyle and the workload were the most dominant responses reported by assistant coaches.

Table 1.4 Percentage of responses in relation to perceived demands in AFL coaching



Results in Table 1.5 indicate the motivation that “drives” an AFL assistant coach. As indicated above, there are a number of challenges that accompany the job of an AFL assistant coach. However, the most dominant factors that were reported by coaches that motivated them to continue coaching were: (i) developing and teaching players, (ii) winning and team success, (iii) the passion and love for the game, and (iv) the team environment and industry.

Table 1.5 Percentage of responses in relation to Coach Motivation



**General Health Questionnaire**

Results from the General Health Question (GHQ) indicated that 98% of assistant coaches reported generally high psychological distress during the football season. More specifically, Table 1.6 indicates that 65.8% of assistant coaches indicated signs of distress and 32.9% of assistant coaches indicated severe problems and psychological distress. Interestingly, only 1.3% of assistant coaches scored in the “typical” range for general health

Table 1.6 Percentage scores of General Health of assistant coaches



### Maslach Burnout Inventory

The majority of assistant coaches reported low levels of Emotional Exhaustion (56.6%) and Depersonalization (61.6%). However, more than one-third of assistant coaches reported a moderate level of Emotional Exhaustion (35.5%) resulting in some coaches feeling emotionally overextended and exhausted by their work. The Depersonalization subscale (30.3%) indicated that almost one-third of coaches had unfeeling and impersonal responses toward recipients of one’s service, care, treatment, or instruction. In addition, it was noted that approximately 1 in 12 (7.9%) assistant coaches did report high levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization. A relatively low level of Personal Accomplishment was identified for assistant coaches resulting in 36.8% of coaches feeling a lack of competence and successful achievements in their work.

Table 1.7 Percentage of assistant coaches who experience burnout

	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal accomplishment
<b>High</b>	7.9 %	7.9 %	26.3%
<b>Moderate</b>	35.5%	30.3%	36.8%
<b>Low</b>	56.6%	61.9%	36.8%

### Depression Anxiety Stress Scale

Responses for the Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale have been reported in Table 1.8 in accordance with the three subscales, and results have been interpreted relative to the normative population.

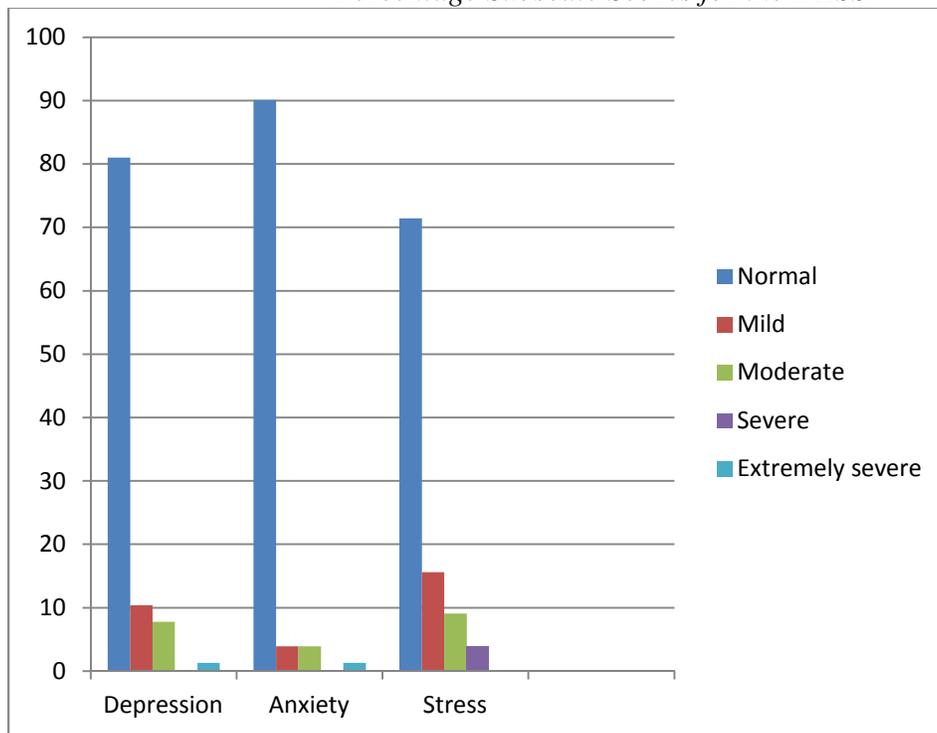
Results indicated that for the subscale **Depression**, 81% of assistant coaches scored in the “normal” range, 10.4% scored in the “mild” range, 7.8% scored in the “moderate” range, no coaches scored in the “severe” range, 1.3% of assistant coaches scored in the “extremely severe” range. Indicating that almost one in 10 coaches reported a moderate to extremely severe range of depression.

Results for the **Anxiety** subscale indicated that 90.1% of assistant coaches scored within the “normal” range, 3.9% for in the “mild range, 3.9% scored in the “moderate” range, no coaches scored in the “severe range, and again, 1.3% of assistant coaches scored in the “extremely severe” range.

Results for the **Stress** subscale indicated that 71.4% of assistant coaches scored in the “normal” range for stress, 15.6% scored in the “mild” range, 9.1% scored in the “moderate” range and 3.9% scored in the “severe” range with no assistant coaches scoring in the “extremely severe” range.

Table 1.8

Percentage Subscale Scores for the DASS



### Job Related Tension Index (JRTI)

Job tension is influenced by the dynamic and changing nature of an organisation and its environment (Wooten et al, 2010). The JRTI measures stress only in terms of the respondents’ perceptions of stress precipitators rather than some objective indicators (Rogers, Li, & Eillis,

1994). However, it is these perceptions that may mediate the negative health and behavioural consequences of particular role demand. Frequency distribution of assistant coaches' responses to the 15 questionnaire items are presented in Table 1.9. Results indicated that generally assistant coaches perceived that they were able to handle their job. Coaches reported that most of the time they felt that they were well liked and accepted by the people they worked with (50%). However assistant coaches did report that their job interfered with their family life some of the time (36%), most of the time (26%) and all of the time (11%). Assistant coaches also reported on the heavy workload associated with their job and the fact that they did not know what the Senior Coach thought about them and how he evaluated their coaching performance.

*Table 1.9 Item distribution for the Job Related Tension Index*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Feeling that you have too little authority to carry out the responsibilities assigned to you	2.09	1.0	28	17	23	4	0
Being unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of your job are	1.88	0.98	35	19	16	5	0
Not knowing what opportunities for advancement or promotion exist for you	2.08	1.21	31	20	11	7	4
Feeling that you have too heavy a workload, one that you can't possibly finish during an ordinary work day	2.16	1.04	25	22	20	7	1
Thinking that you will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people over you	1.82	0.76	28	33	13	1	0
Feeling that you are not fully qualified to handle your job	1.24	0.46	58	16	1	0	0
Not knowing what your supervisor [senior coach] thinks of you, how he evaluates your performance	2.27	1.08	21	25	20	6	3
The fact that you can't get information needed to carry out your job	1.68	0.80	39	22	13	1	0
Having to decide things that affect the lives of individuals, people that you know	1.9	0.85	26	27	20	2	0
Feeling that you may not be liked and accepted by the people you work with	1.56	0.68	40	26	8	0	0
Feeling you are unable to influence your immediate supervisors [senior coach's] decisions and actions that affect you	2.16	0.96	19	34	14	7	1
Not knowing just what the people you work with expect of you	1.74	0.77	32	31	9	2	0
Thinking that the amount of work you have to do may interfere with how well it gets done	1.88	0.87	29	28	15	1	1
Feeling that you have to do things on the job that are against your better judgment	1.64	0.73	37	25	11	0	0
Feeling that your job tends to interfere with your family life	3.22	1.09	6	10	29	21	9

\*Measured on a 5-point likert scale: 1=none of the time, 2=a little of the time, 3=some of the time, 4=most of the time, 5=all of the time



# **Conclusions & Practical Implications**

### **CONCLUSIONS:**

This investigation has facilitated a deeper understanding of the AFL coaching lifestyle. Qualitative interviews have allowed assistant coaches to elaborate on their coaching experiences. While Study 1 was established to gain preliminary information in relation to life satisfaction, general health and well-being, it must be acknowledged that only one representative from each AFL club was involved in the study, therefore results may not provide an accurate representation of all AFL assistant coaches. This limitation however, does not apply to Study 2 which collected data from 85% of assistant coaches in the national competition. This high response rate provided a clear understanding of the experiences of AFL assistant coaches.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Based on the findings from Study 1 and Study 2, a number of recommendations have been suggested. These include:

- The development and implementation of tailored coach education programs
- Seminars that provide coaches with information about how to better achieve a work-life balance (e.g: time management skills and relaxation techniques)
- Psychological skills training for coaches.
- The introduction of a Professional Development accreditation system to enhance coach awareness and to encourage coaches to utilise resources that are available from the AFL Coaches Association, the AFL and the AFL Players Association
- Public recognition for assistant coaches for the contribution they make to the game
- Formalised guidelines for areas to be addressed in coach contracts
- Regular physical and psychological health checks

### **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS:**

#### **Coach education programs:**

Generally, coach education programs have focused on developing a coach's ability to facilitate athletic performance (e.g. Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003), and have not specifically focused on the multidisciplinary, unique, and uncertain social demands of their work (Jones, 2000). In consideration of the evolution of coaching, the advancements in professionalism, and the multiple roles that coaches adopt, it is important to offer specific programs that will provide continual education to coaches around their own personal and professional development. While national conferences have been recognised as an informative approach to disseminate information, informal learning situations that constitute learning through experience have also been suggested (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). For example, previous research has identified a number of factors that have played a significant role in coach development such as: playing experience and personal interpretations of those experiences (e.g. Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Gilbert, & Trudel, 2001), mentoring (e.g. Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998), reflective practice (e.g. Gilbert, & Trudel, 2001), and discussions with other coaches (e.g. Gilbert &

Trudel, 2001). This may potentially assist with coach learning and encourage coaches to develop the opportunity to learn from each other.

**Seminars on work-life balance:**

Following a review of job stress interventions, the most common approach was to focus on the individual worker and provide training in stress management techniques such as relaxation, meditation, and cognitive-behavioural skills (Giga, Noblet, Faragher, & Cooper, 2003).

Findings indicated that coaches found it challenging to find an optimal balance between work and life. Coaches indicated that the main demands were related to “juggling” their work commitments and personal responsibilities.

Generally, assistant coaches had been players themselves and when taking on an employment position as an assistant coach it was reported that the hours from player to coach increased dramatically. Therefore, it is recommended that a “transition program” be established for coaches that have recently retired from football. Potentially this program would provide the “new” coach with information about job expectations, required hours, knowledge of working within a football department and the role of an assistant coach. It may also be beneficial to encourage partners of assistant coaches to attend components of the “transition program” in order to inform them of the requirements of the job. This information may potentially assist partners when providing support to the assistant coach.

**Psychological skills training:**

Consistent with suggestions of Olusoga, Butt, Hays, and Maynard (2009), organisations should consider taking the appropriate steps to ensure that coaches are supported, particularly given the relationship between stress and burnout (Smith, 1986).

Findings from the literature that have investigated occupational stress have identified that burnout is the result of exposure to chronic stress, excessive job demands or imbalance between job demands and expectations (e.g. Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). Given that burnout is more likely in highly motivated individuals with high goals and expectations (Pines, 1993), AFL coaches seem to be more vulnerable than most. Therefore the Football organisations, as well as senior coaches, should be aware of the effect of stressors associated with different variables. For example; family life and working extensive hours throughout the football season.

As one in three assistant coaches reported some form of psychological distress, it would appear appropriate to not only equip athletes with necessary psychological skills, but to also equip coaches in order to manage the competitive sport environment. As suggested by Olusoga et al (2009), due to the fact that coaches are performers too, formal psychological skills training and resilience-building techniques may assist AFL assistant coaches to cope more effectively with the demands of coaching at the elite level.

**Professional development accreditation system:**

Each year the AFL Coaches Association supports their assistant coaches with financial assistance and information about development opportunities. Nevertheless, it has been reported that not all coaches utilise the opportunity provided by the Coaches Association. Therefore, to enhance coach personal development, potentially, an accreditation system could be implemented by which coaches are rewarded for undertaking coach education / development opportunities. This accreditation system would acknowledge coaches who are continually developing and may provide coaches with recognition of prior learning and / or recognition of those who are continuing to learn. In consideration of the high turnover of assistant coaches, an accreditation program may potentially offer coaches the opportunity to build their portfolio for future employment and / or community engagement opportunities.

**Recognition for contribution to the game:**

The “love of the game” was a repeated theme throughout the interviews, and a dominant theme in the questionnaires. While coaches reported that they enjoyed developing players, assistant coaches also reported that they would like to be recognised for the work that they do. Potentially coaches may be more inclined to remain in the industry for longer periods as a coach if they were recognised for their contribution to the game, which may also reduce a feeling of stress and burnout. As a result, this may potentially increase job satisfaction and longevity in the industry and to ensure coach continuity to better develop and sustain quality football programs (Raedeke, Warren, Granzyk, 2002).

**Contract guidelines and workshops:**

Findings from the qualitative data indicated that job insecurity was a major factor that caused AFL assistant coaches to lose focus on their job. Therefore, to potentially increase coach concentration and job satisfaction which would potentially lead to an increase in assistant coach performance, the establishment of a template for formal agreements may be warranted.

By providing the assistant coach with written confirmation of a contract extension or job termination approximately two months before the current contract is due to expire may potentially allow the assistant coach to plan for the future. In turn, this would ensure that the assistant coach is focused solely on their coaching role in the latter half of the season instead of focusing on an uncertain future. As a result, increasing coach productivity could then be transferred to an increase in player productivity which will result in successful on field performances.

**Regular physical and psychological health checks:**

Findings from Study 1 and Study 2 indicated that there are potential health risks for assistant coaches when working in the AFL. Therefore, it is recommended that the AFL Coaches Association be encouraged to source suitably qualified experts in physical and mental health and implement appropriate programs on an annual basis and make these available for access by members.

**Dissemination of information:**

- A summary of findings from each study to be provided to all AFL coaches via the AFL Coaches Association
- Research report to be revised and submitted accordingly for peer review in International Journals
- Research findings to be presented at conferences and workshops
- Findings to be available on the AFL Coaches Association website.

**Future Research:**

It must be noted that these findings apply only to assistant coaches. Potentially workloads, demands and stressors may increase in Senior Coach positions therefore life satisfaction, health and wellbeing may warrant further investigation.

## REFERENCES:

- Bloom, G., A., Durand-Bush, N., Schinke, R., J., & Salmela, J., H. (1998). The importance of mentoring in the development of coaches and athletes. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 29, 267-281.
- Boyatis, R. E. (198). *Transforming qualitative information: thematic analysis and code development*. CA: Sage Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Cronbach, L. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, 16, 297-334.
- Cushion, C., J., Armour, K. M., & Jones, R.L. (2003). Coach education and continuing professional development: Experience and learning to coach. *Quest*, 55, 215-230.
- Donath, S. (2001). The validity of the 12-item General Health Questionnaire in Australia: a comparison between three scoring methods. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 35, 231-235.
- Fletcher, D., & Scott, M. (2010). Psychological stress in sports coaches: A review of concepts, research and practice. *Journal of Sports Science*, 28(2), 127-137.
- Frey, M. (2007). College coaches' experiences with stress – Problem solvers have problems too. *The Sport Psychologist*, 21, 38-57.
- Gao, F., Luo, N., Thumboo, J., Fones, C., Li, S., & Cheung, Y. (2004). Does the 12-item General Health Questionnaire contain multiple factors and do we need them? *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 2, 63-70
- Giga, S., Noblet, A., Faragher, B., & Cooper, C. (2003). Organisational stress management interventions: a review of UK-based research. *The Australian Psychologist*, 38, 158-164.
- Gilbert, W., & Trudel, P. (2001). Learning to coach through experience: reflection in model youth sport coaches. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21, 16-34.
- Gilbert, W., & Trudel, P. (2005). Learning to coach through experience: conditions that influence reflection. *The Physical Educator*, 62(1), 32-43.
- Godin, I., Kittel, F., Coppieters, Y., & Siegrist, J. (2005). A prospective study of cumulative job stress in relation to mental health. *BMC Public Health*, 5, 67, doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-5-67.
- Goldberg, D., & Williams, P. (1988). *A User's Guide to the GHQ*. NFER-Nelson: Windsor.

- Goodger, K., Gorely, T., Lavallee, D., & Harwood, C. (2007). Burnout in sport: A systematic review. *The Sports Psychologist, 21*, 127-151.
- Gould, D., Guinan, D., Greenleaf, C., & Chung, Y. (2002). A survey of U.S Olympic coaches: variables perceived to have influenced athlete performances and coach effectiveness. *The Sports Psychologist, 16*, 229-250.
- Hanton, S., Fletcher, D., & Coughlan, G. (2005). Stress in elite sport performers: A comparative study of competitive and organizational stressor. *Journal of Sports Sciences, 23*, 1129-1141.
- Hjalm, S., Kentta, G., Hassmenan, P., & Gustasson, H. (2007). Burnout among elite soccer coaches. *Journal of sport behavior, 30* (4), 415-427.
- Jones, R. L. (2000). Toward a sociology of coaching. In R. L. Jones & K. M. Armour (Eds.), *The Sociology of Sport: Theory and Practice* (pp.33-43). London: Longman.
- Kelley, B. C., & Gill, D. L. (1993). An examination of personal/situational variables, stress appraisal, and burnout in collegiate teacher-coaches. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 64*(1), 94-102.
- Levi, L. (1996). Spice of life or kiss of death. In Cooper, C. L. (ed.). *Handbook of stress, Medicine, and Health*, CRC Press, New York.
- Lovibond, S., H., & Lovibond, P., F. (1995). *Manual for the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale*. Australia: Psychology Foundation Monograph.
- Lu, I. (1999). Work motivation, job stress and employees' well-being. *Journal of Applied Management Studies, 8*, 61-72.
- Lyle, J. (2002). *Sports coaching concepts: A framework for coaches' behavior*. London: Routledge.
- Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1986). *MBI: Maslach Burnout Inventory: Manual Research Edition*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Olusoga, P., Butt, J., Hays, K., & Maynard, I. (2009). Stress in elite sports coaching: Identifying stressors. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 21*, 442-459.
- Pines, A. (1993). Burnout: an existential perspective. In W.B. Schaufeli, C. Maslach, & T. Marek (Eds.), *Professional burnout: Recent developments in theory and research* (pp.35-51). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- Raedeke, D., Warren, A. H., & Granzky, T. L. (2002). Coaching commitment and turnover: A comparison of current and former coaches. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 73*, 73-86.

- Roulston, K. (2001). Data analysis and theorizing as ideology. *Qualitative Research, 1*, 279-302.
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Buunk, B. P. (2003). Burnout: An overview of 25 years of research and theorizing. In M. J. Schabracq, J. A. M. Winnubst, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.). *The handbook of work and health psychology* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). pp. 383-425). Chichester: Wiley.
- Smith, R. (1986). Toward a cognitive-affective model of athletic burnout. *Journal of Sport Psychology, 8*, 36-50.
- Spielberger, C. D. (2010). Job stress survey. *Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Spence Laschinger, H. K., Finegan, J., Shamian, J., & Wilk, P. (2003). Workplace empowerment as a predictor of nurse burnout in restructured health care settings, *Longwoods Review, 1*(3), 2-11.
- Thelwell, R. C., Weston, N. J. V., Greenless, I. A., & Hutchings, N. V. (2008). A qualitative exploration of psychological-skills use in coaches. *The Sports Psychologist, 22*, 38-53.
- Thompson, B. M., Kirk, A., & Brown, D. (2006). Sources of stress in policewomen: A three-factor model. *International Journal of Stress Management, 13*(3), 309-328.
- Winefield, A., H., & Jarrett, R. (2001). Occupational stress in University staff. *International Journal of Stress Management, 8*(4), 285-298.
- Wooten, N., R., Fakunmoju, S., B., Kim H., J., & LeFeure, A., L. (2010). Factor structure of the Job Related Tension Index among social workers. *Research on Social Work Practice, 20*(1), 74-86.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **The AFL Coaching Lifestyle: Improving the life satisfaction, health and well-being.**

#### **Interview Schedule**

##### **Background Information:**

- Could you please provide an overview of your AFL coaching experience?
- Number of years involved at AFL level
- Previous coaching employment
- Can you describe your work commitments associated with AFL coaching during a normal week in-season? (e.g. main tasks and hours per week)

##### **Performance:**

- What do you perceive to be the main demands that you face when coaching in the AFL?
- How do you try to cope with the demands?
- What do you perceive as potential internal factors that may influence your performance as a coach?
- What do you perceive as potential external factors that may influence your performance as a coach?
- What would you describe as the main challenges you have faced in your role as an assistant coach / past coach?
- What were some of the more successful strategies you used to overcome these challenges?
- Were there some unsuccessful strategies?

##### **General Health:**

- Can you tell me about other stressors that may be related to / or impact your job?
- Under your current contract, to what extent have you utilized your annual leave, personal leave and sick leave? (e.g. please specify approximate numbers of days of each involved).

##### **Life satisfaction:**

- Can you describe your understanding of a work-life balance?
- Do you perceive that there may be some variables that may influence your work-life balance?
- Do you perceive any potential conflicting priorities in relation to a work-life balance?

The next questions asks you to rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 = minimal satisfaction, 5 = very satisfied)

- To what extent are you currently satisfied with your work-life balance while employed as an assistant coach?  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- To what extent do you perceive this balance to be health-promoting?  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- Can you explain some reasons for your rating to the above question?

**Social Support:**

The next questions asks you to rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 = minimal support, 5 = very high level of support)

In relation to your social support networks, to what extent do you feel that you are supported in your current role:

- From the senior coach and other assistants?  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- From the AFL Coaches Association?  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- From your immediate family?  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Can you explain some reasons for your rating to the above question?

**Motivation:**

- What motivates you to continue AFL coaching?
- Are you extrinsically motivated or intrinsically motivated by AFL coaching?
- What motivates you to work the hours that you work?
- Do you think your employment commitments parallel to that of any other job?

**Workplace employment:**

- What are some of the challenges you have faced when renegotiating your contract with your current / past club? How have you overcome these challenges?
- Have you sought advice from a professional or professional organisation to assist you with your contract negotiations? Please discuss.
- Have you been advised and / or understand the consequences of your contract's termination clause?

**Additional Information** - Is there any additional information you would like to add?

## APPENDIX B

### AFL Coaching Lifestyle: Improving life satisfaction, health & well being

*This research abides by ethical standards and a strict code of conduct  
All information is confidential.*

*The research is being conducted by Dr. Mandy Ruddock-Hudson  
The research is supported by the AFL Coaches Association in conjunction with La Trobe  
University and funded by the AFL*

*Should any of these questions cause distress, please contact a representative from the AFL  
Coaches Association to access advice or support*

---

**Please tick the box:**

- Number of years involved in coaching / development at **AFL level**:

0-3 years       4-6years       7-10years       10 plus years

- Number of hours associated with AFL Coaching during a **normal week in-season**:

10-20 hours       20-30 hours       30-40 hours       50-60 hours

60-70 hours       70-80 hours       80 plus hours

Think of a time when you were **extremely satisfied** with your role as an assistant /  
development coach:

Please describe the situation:

---

---

---

How did the situation make you feel?

---

---

---

Think of a time when you were extremely **un-satisfied** with your role as an assistant /  
development coach:

Please describe the situation:



- From the management at your club

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Minimal support support very high level of support

- From the AFL Coaches Association

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Minimal support support very high level of support

- From friends and colleagues

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Minimal support support very high level of support

- From your immediate family

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Minimal support support very high level of support

What motivates you to continue AFL coaching?

1)

---

2)

---

3)

---

- How much longer would you like to continue coaching in the AFL system?

0-5 years  6-10 years  10 years plus

- Do you have a mentor outside the Club? Yes  No

If "yes" how did this relationship come about?

---

---

---

- How strongly would you recommend a mentor to other assistant coaches?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
Not at all very strongly

- Are there any particular teaching methods you implement into your coaching practice?  
Yes  No

If yes, please explain:

---

---

---

- During the football season do you receive **one day** off per week?  
Never  Sometimes  Every week
- Have you been advised and / or understand the consequences of your contract's termination clause?  
Yes  No

- Is there any additional information you would like to add to support this research?

---

---

---

---

---

***Please continue with the questionnaire...***

## APPENDIX C

### General Health Questionnaire

We would like to know how your health has been in general over the **PAST WEEK**.

Please read the questions below and each of the four possible answers. Please circle the response that best applies to you

***Have you recently:***

1) Been able to concentrate on what you're doing?

Better than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual
-------------------	---------------	-----------------	----------------------

2) Lost much sleep over worry?

Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
------------	--------------------	------------------------	----------------------

3) Felt that you are playing a useful part in things?

More so than usual	Same as usual	Less so than usual	Much less than usual
--------------------	---------------	--------------------	----------------------

4) felt capable of making decisions about things?

More so than usual	Same as usual	Less so than usual	Much less than usual
--------------------	---------------	--------------------	----------------------

5) Felt constantly under strain?

Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
------------	--------------------	------------------------	----------------------

6) Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?

Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
------------	--------------------	------------------------	----------------------

7) Been able to enjoy your normal day to day activities?

More so than usual	Same as usual	Less so than usual	Much less than usual
--------------------	---------------	--------------------	----------------------

8) Been able to face up to your problems?

More so than usual	Same as usual	Less so than usual	Much less than usual
--------------------	---------------	--------------------	----------------------

9) Been feeling unhappy or depressed?

Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
------------	--------------------	------------------------	----------------------

10) Been losing confidence in yourself?

Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
------------	--------------------	------------------------	----------------------

11) Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?

Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
------------	--------------------	------------------------	----------------------

12) Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?

Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
------------	--------------------	------------------------	----------------------

## APPENDIX D

### Maslach Burnout Inventory

Below are 22 statements of job-related feelings.

Please read each statement carefully and indicate, by ticking the box, if you ever feel this way about **your job**.

	Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
I feel emotionally drained from work							
I feel used up at the end of the workday							
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job							
I can easily understand how my recipients feel about things							
I feel I can treat some recipients as if they were impersonal objects							
Working with people all day is really a strain for me							
I deal very effectively with the problems of my recipients							
I feel burned out from my work							
I feel I am positively influencing other people's lives through my work							
I have become more callous toward people since I took this job							
I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally							
I feel very energetic							
I feel frustrated by my job							
I feel I'm working too hard on my job							
I don't really care what happens to some recipients							
Working with people directly puts too much stress on me							
I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my recipients							
I feel exhilarated after working closely with my recipients							
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job							
I feel like I am at the end of my rope							
In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly							
I feel recipients blame me for some of their problems							

## APPENDIX E

### Depression, Anxiety Stress Scale

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2, or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the **PAST WEEK**. There is no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

**0** = Did not apply to me

**1** = Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time

**2** = Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time

**3** = Applied to me very much, or most of the time

Over the past week..	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
1. I found it hard to wind down				
2. I was aware of dryness in my mouth				
3. I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all				
4. I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)				
5. I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things				
6. I tended to over-react to situations				
7. I experienced trembling (e.g. In the hands)				
8. I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy				
9. I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself				
10. I felt that I had nothing to look forward to				
11. I found myself getting agitated				
12. I found it difficult to relax				
13. I felt down-hearted and blue				
14. I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing				
15. I felt I was close to panic				
16. I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything				
17. I felt I wasn't worth much as a person				
18. I felt that I was rather touchy				
19. I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)				
20. I felt scared without any good reason				
21. I felt that life was meaningless				

## APPENDIX F

### Job Related Tension Index Questionnaire

The below questionnaire relates to your current job situation. Please tick the most appropriate answer

How frequently do you feel bothered by each of the following work situations?	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All the time
Feeling that you have too little authority to carry out the responsibilities assigned to you					
Being unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of your job are					
Not knowing what opportunities for advancement or promotion exist for you					
Feeling that you have too heavy a workload, one that you can't possibly finish during an ordinary work day					
Thinking that you will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people over you					
Feeling that you are not fully qualified to handle your job					
Not knowing what your supervisor [senior coach] thinks of you, how he evaluates your performance					
The fact that you can't get information needed to carry out your job					
Having to decide things that affect the lives of individuals, people that you know					
Feeling that you may not be liked and accepted by the people you work with					
Feeling you are unable to influence your immediate supervisors [senior coach's] decisions and actions that affect you					
Not knowing just what the people you work with expect of you					
Thinking that the amount of work you have to do may interfere with how well it gets done					
Feeling that you have to do things on the job that are against your better judgment					
Feeling that your job tends to interfere with your family life					

***Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire.***